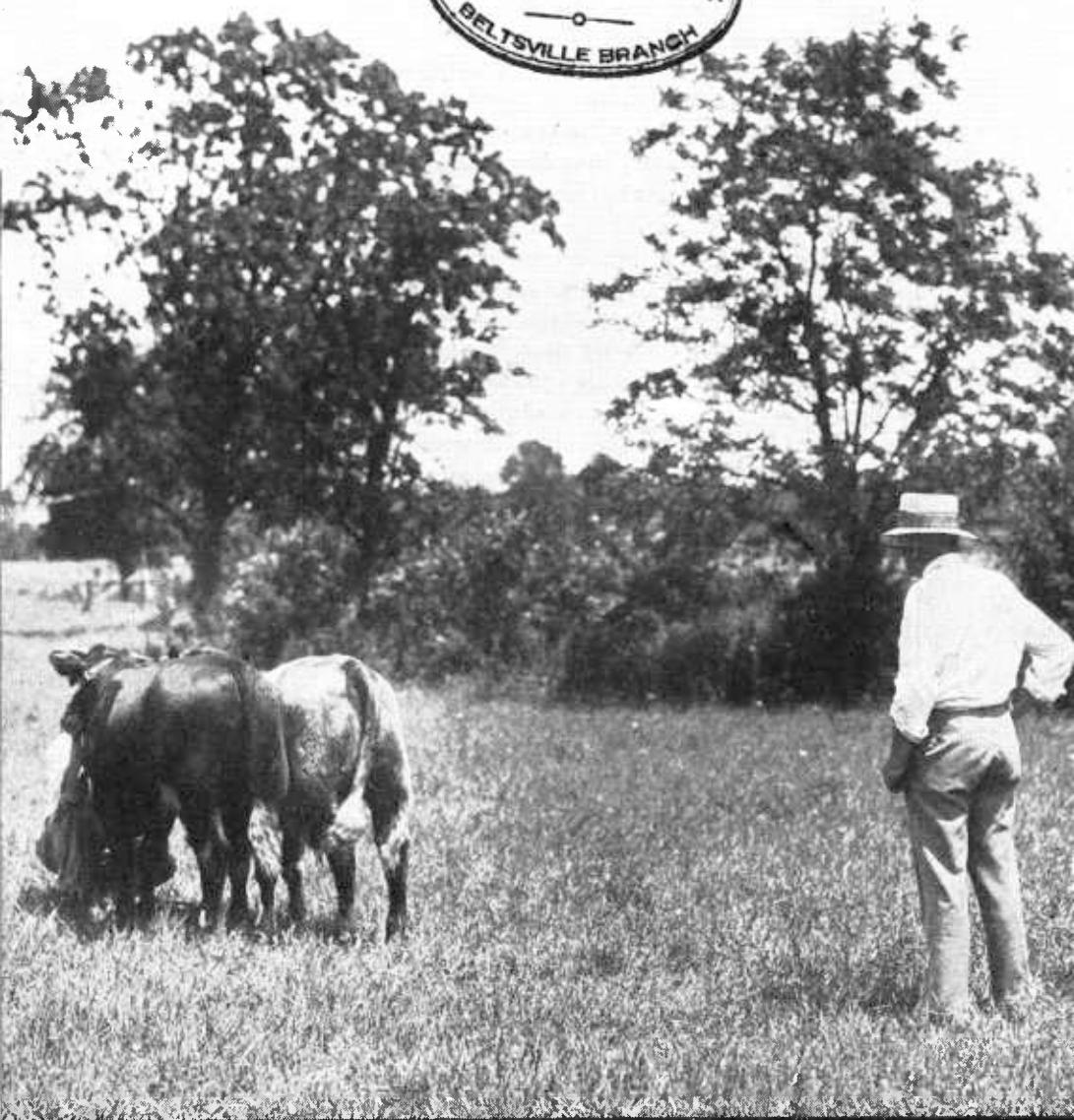


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# Judging BEEF CATTLE



FARMERS' BULLETIN No. 1068  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**B**EEF-CATTLE breeders and feeders alike should be good judges of the classes of cattle with which they are working. In judging beef cattle one should have in mind the type which approaches his ideal, and this should usually be that which appears to be in popular demand. Types may gradually change within a score of years, but the trend in the beef breeds during the last 20 or 30 years has been toward the short-legged, compact type.

Although beef cattlemen are realizing more and more as time goes on that the ability of an animal as a breeder or the feeding efficiency of its offspring, from a market standpoint, can be determined accurately only by performance testing, yet it is highly desirable to select animals that are well developed in the most important regions, such as chest, loin, and hindquarters.

At the same time it should be recognized that in judging cattle one is dealing with the genetic phase called phenotype and that progress in breed improvement based on external appearance alone has distinct limitations.

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Washington, D. C.

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# JUDGING BEEF CATTLE

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## GOOD JUDGMENT VALUABLE TO BUYER AND FEEDER

THE LINE of breeding, the pedigree, and the beef-producing performance of closely related animals, including offspring, largely determine the value of breeding stock. The individual animal, however, should be a good specimen from the standpoint of conformation as well. It should be recognized that in judging cattle one is observing only what the geneticists term "phenotypical" characters, signifying those that are visible. To attain the greatest degree of success, a livestock breeder, in addition to keeping breeding and performance records, must be a good judge so that he can properly mate individuals in the herd. This knowledge may be obtained through years of experience in handling cattle; but with a thorough knowledge of judging, much time may be saved in the attainment of the desired results.

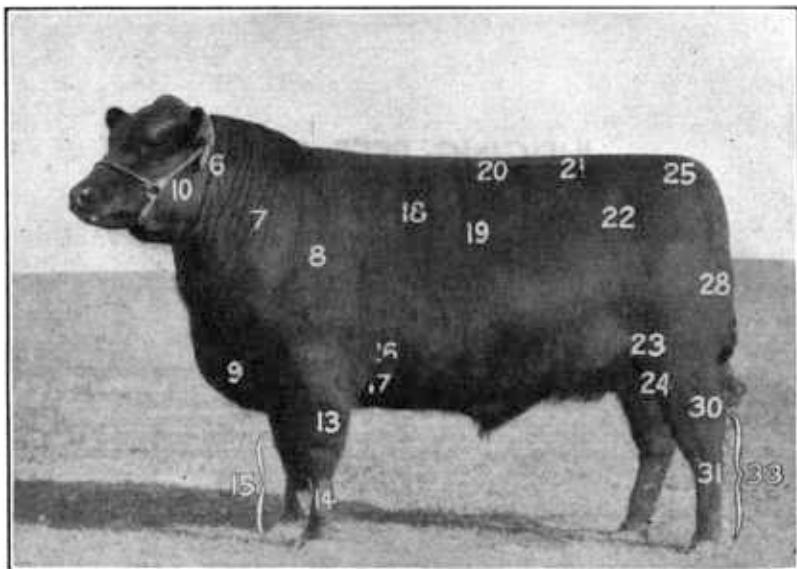
Men who buy feeders at the markets or from breeders are frequently not capable buyers. To the man who feeds cattle for commercial purposes it is more important to be able to judge feeders than fat cattle, as profits in cattle feeding often depend upon knowledge and skill in buying the cattle.

## QUALIFICATIONS OF A JUDGE

Knowledge of judging cattle cannot be learned solely from books. The experience gained from working with cattle and from visiting shows where expert judges place cattle will assist materially. A liking for the work, however, is an important requisite.

To be efficient a cattle judge should have a well-trained eye and know the breed characteristics and have in mind the ideal animal in the class under consideration. At public shows he must know the classification for the various classes of animals. In case of any dis-

<sup>1</sup> This bulletin is a revision of former editions by E. H. Thompson.



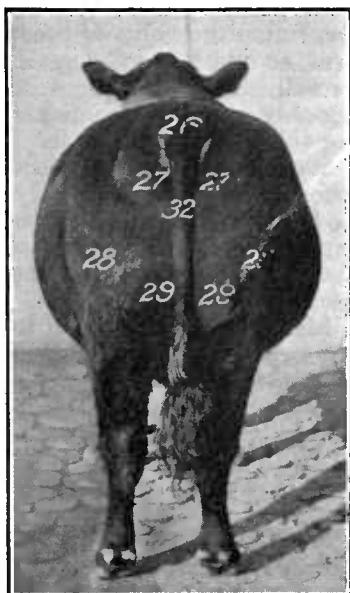
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FIGURE 1



21917-C

FIGURE 2



21918-C

FIGURE 3

FIGURES 1, 2, AND 3.—Points of the beef animal.

1. Muzzle.	8. Shoulder.	15. Foreleg.	22. Hip.	28. Thighs.
2. Eyes.	9. Brisket.	16. Chest.	23. Hind flank.	29. Twist.
3. Face.	10. Jaw.	17. Fore flank.	24. Cod or purse.	30. Hock.
4. Forehead.	11. Breast.	18. Crops.	25. Rump.	31. Shank.
5. Ears.	12. Dewlap.	19. Ribs.	26. Tail head.	32. Tail.
6. Neck.	13. Arm.	20. Back.	27. Pin bones.	33. Hind leg.
7. Shoulder vein.	14. Shin.	21. Loin.		

agreement in regard to his placing, he should be willing and able to give his reasons.

A good judge keeps in practice, otherwise his powers of observation weaken. Personal favor or prejudice must be laid aside, and suggestions, hints, or special favors asked by any of the exhibitors must be disregarded.

### BEEF TYPE—DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

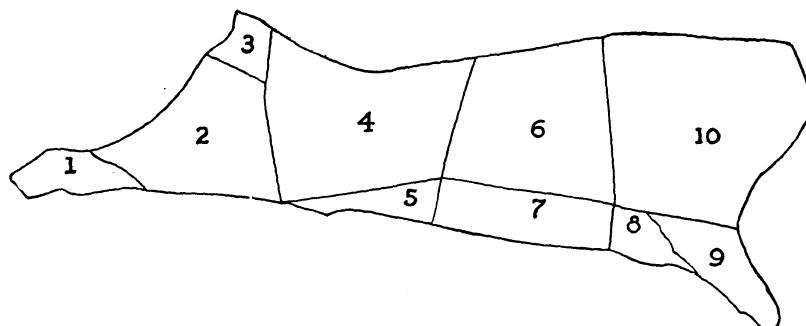
Without ideals, a judge cannot be a success. The small cattle owner, as well as the man who owns a large herd, needs to be familiar with the ideal beef type. Since the purpose of a beef animal is to supply beef for the butcher's block it may be said that the ideal beef type is the animal that will produce most economically the largest amount of the highest-priced cuts of beef, when fattened and butchered. The ideal beef animal when fat has a low-set body, which is broad, deep, smooth, and thickly fleshed.

### POINTS OF THE BEEF ANIMAL

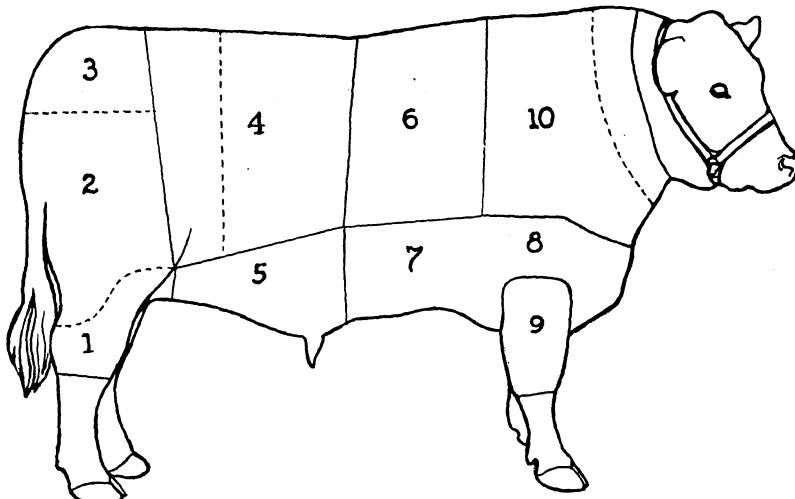
In learning to judge beef cattle it is necessary to become familiar with the locations and names of the different parts of the animal. The names are similar in all classes of livestock and can be learned easily by referring to the illustrations of live animals. In systematic judging the student becomes familiar with the various parts in a short time, because he has an opportunity to make frequent mention of the parts in discussing the placing of the individuals. Knowing the locations of the parts thoroughly is important in that the ideal for each part must be kept constantly in mind. The conformation of the part must be associated with the function it has to perform. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the names and locations of the various parts.

### PARTS OF THE BEEF CARCASS

The names of the wholesale cuts of the beef carcass correspond quite closely to those on the live animal, the only difference being that the wholesale carcass contains fewer parts. The head is eliminated in the dressed carcass. The neck, shoulder vein, and shoulders back to the crops constitute the chuck. The front leg from the knee up constitutes the fore shank, commonly called shank, and the brisket and chest back toward the middle of the body embrace the plate. The rib is the region of the back above the plate and extends from the shoulder back to and including the last rib. The loin extends from the ribs back to and including the hips. The flank on the carcass corresponds very closely to the flank on the live animal. It is that portion below the loin and extending from the plate backward. The round contains the greater part of the animal back of the hip. In the carcass cut, it contains parts 1, 2, and 3, sometimes called hind shank, round, and rump, collectively known as the round. The term "shank" usually refers to the fore shank of the front leg only (fig. 4).



Wholesale cuts on carcass



Corresponding cuts on live animal

FIGURE 4.—Comparison of wholesale cuts on the carcass with their location in the live animal.

*Principal wholesale cuts of carcass and percentage of each*

Location and name of cut	Percent of carcass by weight	Location and name of cut	Percent of carcass by weight
1, 2, and 3, round	24.09	9, shank	5.75
4, join	16.38	10, chuck	22.15
5, flank	3.53	Suet	4.00
6, rib	9.64		
7 and 8, plate	14.46	Total	100.00

**CLASSIFICATION USED IN JUDGING BEEF CATTLE**

From the butcher's standpoint cattle may be divided into three classes: Fat cattle, feeders, and breeding cattle. The first comprises animals ready for the butcher's block; the second is the unfinished product; and the third constitutes the class from which the others are

produced. The ultimate aim of the three classes is the same, but they must be judged somewhat differently. In fat cattle one must judge according to what the cattle are at the time. In feeders the animal which gives promise of putting on the biggest and cheapest gains and developing into the best beef form when fattened is the kind one desires. In breeding cattle the true beef form is of prime importance, but there must also be a reasonable assurance that the beef characteristics will be transmitted to the offspring. In general the same beef form will be found in each class, only in different degree.

### JUDGING FAT CATTLE

The class called fat cattle includes fat steers and heifers, calves, cows, and bulls. Fat steers and heifers constitute by far the largest percentage of fat cattle. Each must be considered from the butcher's point of view and his ideal must be the deciding factor in placing the awards.

In judging fat cattle the finish and quality of flesh are of prime importance. A well-finished animal has fat interspersed among the tissues of lean meat. This is termed marbling. In this connection it may be said that cattle bred especially for beef purposes have a greater tendency to produce marbled meat or to deposit layers of fat throughout the lean meat than do cattle which are bred exclusively to produce dairy products. The latter cattle tend to deposit the surplus fat principally around the internal organs.

In fat cattle indications of a high dressing percentage are of importance. This is largely reflected by absence of paunchiness and coarseness.

### JUDGING FEEDERS

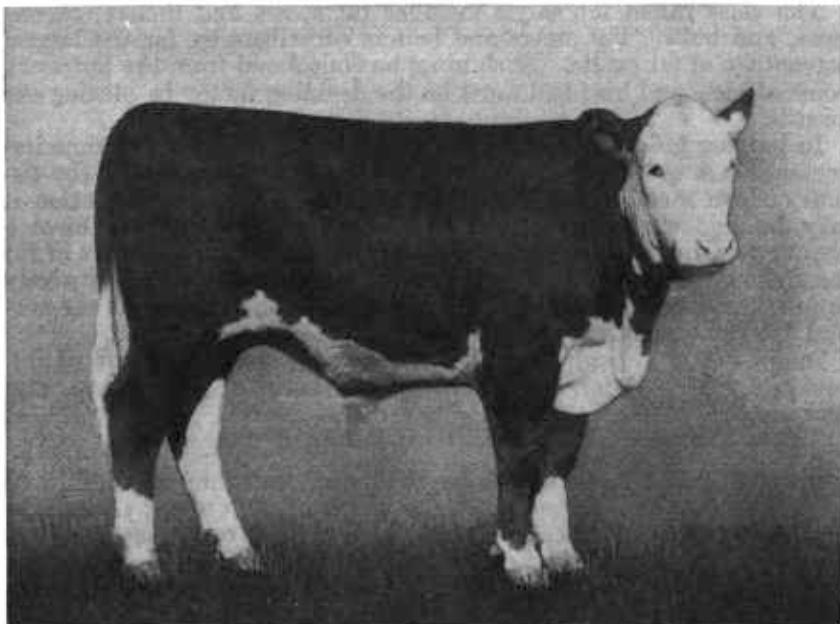
In judging feeders it must be borne in mind that they are unfinished cattle and therefore do not have the depth of flesh of fat cattle. In general the same qualifications apply to feeders as to fat cattle except that certain points of the score card must be emphasized and others minimized. The desirable feeder is one that will use feed advantageously and dress out a high percentage of the most desirable cuts when finished and slaughtered. The feeder should have a rugged constitution and "middle" enough to indicate that large quantities of feed can be consumed and converted into beef. A good indication of constitution in a feeder is a large heart girth and thickness in general. The body should be short, wide, deep, and generally smooth throughout. There should be no undue prominence in the shoulders or hips and the hindquarters should be wide and deep (figs. 5 and 6).

The handling qualities are as important in a feeder as in a finished animal, as they are good indications of thrift and feeding qualities. The hide should be pliable and the hair soft and silky.

A separate score card for feeder cattle may be desirable, but the same qualifications apply to both feeders and fat cattle. The main difference is in the degree of perfection of the various parts. Proportionately the conformation and the external parts of the feeder bear the same relation to each other as they do in the fat animal. For that reason it is suggested that the same score card be used for the two classes of animals, because the feeder has to be judged in terms of the fat animal.

**JUDGING BREEDING CATTLE**

Breeding cattle must have the true beef form. In that respect cattle in good breeding condition are intermediate between feeders and fat cattle so far as flesh is concerned. Early maturity and easy-fattening qualities should be present to a marked degree. Good handling qualities are essential, as an excessive covering of fat, showing that the animals have been pampered, is undesirable. Thickness of flesh is necessarily a factor of great importance, but breeding cattle should be judged more by their value as breeding stock than by the flesh they carry. Often a superabundance of flesh hides defects, and



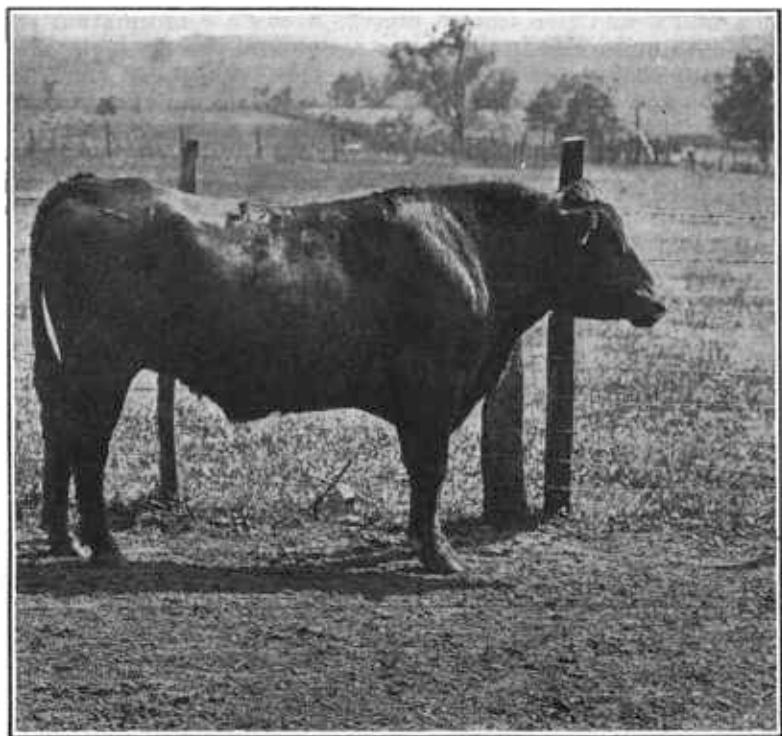
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FIGURE 5.—A steer of desirable type. This steer was a Choice feeder and when picture was taken it was approaching the Choice grade as a slaughter steer.

the poorer animal wins in the show ring as a result of greater fitting.

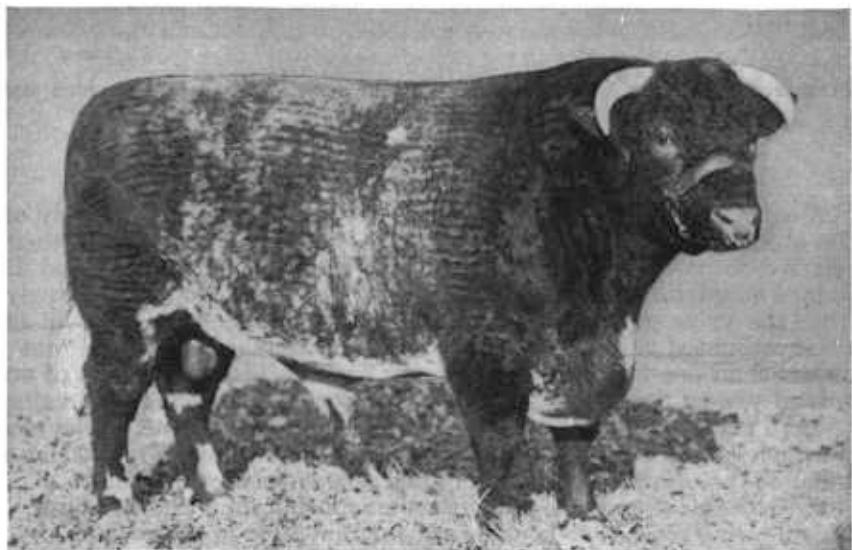
In addition to desired beef conformation, certain sexual characters and a vigorous constitution are important in beef cattle. Sexual characters in male and female differ. In the bull masculinity should be pronounced (fig. 7). The head should be broad between the eyes, short in length, and full in the forehead. If the animal belongs to a horned breed, the horns should be strong and characteristic of the breed represented. In a bull the neck is short and thick, with a well-developed crest, and neatly attached to the shoulders. The color markings, while of no value from the butcher's standpoint, should be typical of the breed.

Females should show general refinement throughout the body (fig. 8). The head should have width and fullness in the forehead. The horns are finer and usually more curved, the neck thinner and longer



10941-C

FIGURE 6.—A feeder steer showing undesirable qualities, such as small heart girth, low back and loin, and shallow hindquarters.



68444-B

FIGURE 7.—A bull of desirable beef type. Note masculinity and vigor, which are essential in a beef bull.

than a bull's, and free from a crest. A cow's conformation shows more length and width in the pelvic region and the pin bones should be wider apart but not prominent. A cow usually has more barrel than a bull and also a longer body. Though milking qualities should not be emphasized unduly, it is desirable to have cows with good udder and teat development. A good flow of milk assures that the calf will have a good start, which is so essential in raising beef calves profitably.



5067-C

FIGURE 8.—A heifer having refinement and femininity, both of which are desirable.

### SCORE CARD FOR FAT AND FEEDER CATTLE

A score card is often used as a guide for making a detailed study of the animal, and the values given to the various points indicate their relative importance. In scoring, each part is considered, and if judged as inferior to the perfect animal, "cuts" are made accordingly from the value given that part in the standard score. The sum of these estimated values gives the score of the animal judged. A "cut" of less than one-fourth of 1 percent is never made, and a part of an animal seldom deserves a "cut" of more than 50 percent of the value of that part. The animal is scored from the standpoint of the use to which it is to be put. The parts named in the score card are those which are associated with utility or market requirements of the animal.

Since the fat steer is the principal source of beef supply of the country, the following score card is made out for that type in particular:

## Score card for fat and feeder beef cattle

Class -----

Scale of points	Standard	Student's score.	Corrected score
<b>A. GENERAL APPEARANCE—38 percent:</b>			
1. Weight according to age, estimated ----- pounds; actual, ----- pounds	10		
2. Form—broad, deep, low-set, smooth, compact, cylindrical, straight top and underline; stylish	10		
3. Quality—loose, pliable skin of medium thickness; dense, clean, medium-sized bone; fine, soft hair	8		
4. Condition—deep, even covering of firm, mellow flesh, free from patches, ties, lumps, and rolls; full cod and flank, indicating finish	10		
<b>B. HEAD AND NECK—6 percent:</b>			
5. Muzzle broad; mouth large; nostrils large and open	1		
6. Eyes, large, clear, placid	1		
7. Face short, jaws strong	1		
8. Forehead broad, full; ears medium-sized, fine-textured	1		
9. Neck short, thick, blending smoothly with shoulders; throat clean with light dewlap	2		
<b>C. FOREQUARTERS—8 percent:</b>			
10. Shoulder vein, full	2		
11. Shoulders smoothly covered, compact, snug, neat	3		
12. Brisket trim, neat; breast wide and full	2		
13. Legs wide apart, straight, short; arm full, shank fine	1		
<b>D. BODY—30 percent:</b>			
14. Chest full, deep, wide; girth large; crops full	4		
15. Ribs long, arched, thickly and smoothly fleshed	8		
16. Back broad, straight, thickly and smoothly fleshed	8		
17. Loin thick, broad, evenly covered	8		
18. Flank full, even with underline	2		
<b>E. HINDQUARTERS—18 percent:</b>			
19. Hips smooth, evenly covered	2		
20. Rump long, wide, level; tailhead smooth; pinbones wide apart, not prominent	5		
21. Thighs deep, full	5		
22. Twists deep, plump	5		
23. Legs wide apart, straight, short; shanks fine, smooth	1		
	100		

## DISCUSSION OF THE SCORE CARD

In the judging of fat cattle the score card is divided into five parts, each carrying a certain percentage of the 100 points of a perfect individual. The five parts and the relative importance of each are as follows:

	Percent
A. General appearance	38
B. Head and neck	6
C. Forequarters	8
D. Body	30
E. Hindquarters	18
	100

Each of the parts is subdivided into smaller divisions and given a relative value. A brief discussion is given for each of the larger subdivisions as well as the smaller ones.

## A. General Appearance

The general appearance includes weight, form, quality, and condition. In comparing the general appearance of different animals one must consider the relative merits of these points as a single unit.

The general appearance is a fair index to the placing of the animal, but the other details must be taken into consideration before a final decision should be made as to the relative merits of different individuals.

1. *Weight*.—The weight of an animal according to its age is considered important as an indication that the greatest possible growth and fattening have been taking place ever since birth. Early maturity is desired in beef cattle because it is highly important to have animals which begin to put on flesh early and at the same time show size, vigor, and quality.

2. *Form*.—In judging fat steers the point of view taken must be largely that of the butcher, and therefore the favored fat animal is of the low-set, deep, broad, compact type that will yield a large quantity of valuable meat. A steer that is "leggy," cut up in the flank, and small in heart girth rarely makes a good feeder and accordingly does not develop into the most desirable fat animal.

3. *Quality*.—In a fat steer quality means fine bone, soft, mellow hide, fine, silky hair, and general refinement of features, together with a covering of flesh which is smooth and firm. An animal having quality should in general show the absence of coarse joints, prominent hips, and coarse shoulders.

4. *Condition*.—This refers to the degree of fatness or finish which is found in the animal. A good indication of the finish of an animal is the fullness of the cod and the thickness of the flank. The cod is considered to be the last place to take on fat, and when it becomes full the animal is generally well finished. In a well-finished animal the fullness of the flank will cause the bottom line to be comparatively straight.

#### B. Head and Neck

The head and neck are not important because of the meat they contain, but for their contribution to general appearance. Many experienced cattle feeders contend that the head is sufficient for them to tell whether the animal is a good feeder. Actual head-measurement studies, however, reveal no close relationship between the size or shape of head and the performance. The eyes should be clear and prominent and have a docile appearance, indicative of a quiet temperament and good health. The face should be short and the jaws strong and wide apart at the base. As viewed from the side, the profile of the head should show a wide angle. The ears should be medium sized, of fine texture, and covered with fine, silky hair. If horns are present they should be small or medium sized and free from undue coarseness.

The neck should be short and thick and should blend smoothly with the shoulders. The top line from the neck to the tailhead, should be straight.

#### C. Forequarters

The forequarters include the shoulder vein, shoulders, brisket, and legs. The forequarters should be well proportioned so as to connect smoothly with the neck and body. Coarseness in the forequarters should be avoided, but a fullness of the various parts is desirable.

The shoulder vein should be full and the shoulders smooth, compact, and evenly covered with flesh so that the neck fits snugly into the body. This part should be free from coarseness and the shoulder blades should be practically hidden from view. The brisket should be medium sized and prominent enough to make the body appear rectangular as viewed from the side. Freedom from coarseness is desired in the brisket. The legs should be short, straight, set well apart, and show refinement, which acts as an indication of quality and a high dressing percentage in the carcass.

#### D. Body

The body of the animal contains the most valuable cuts of beef. Included under this heading are chest, ribs, back, loin, and flank. In general, the body should be broad and deep with the underline and the top line parallel or nearly so. The body should be well rounded with well-sprung ribs but free from paunchiness.

The chest should be wide, deep, and have a large girth. The crops must be full so that there is no depression behind the shoulder. Long, well-arched ribs thickly and smoothly covered with flesh are desirable. The back should be broad and straight and carry a thick covering of flesh. The most valuable part of the carcass is the loin, which extends from the last rib backward to the hip joints. It should be broad and thick. The fore and rear flanks should be deep, making a level underline.

#### E. Hindquarters

The hindquarters should be deep and as broad as the shoulders. The hips should be smooth and not prominent. The rump should be long and wide, carry out smoothly from hips to tailhead, and be free from patches and rolls caused by uneven deposits of fat. The thighs should be deep and full and the twist deep and plump. The hind legs, as well as the front ones, should be wide apart, short, and straight, with the bone showing freedom from coarseness.

Great emphasis should be placed upon the development of the hindquarters because the cuts in this part of the body contain some of the most popular cuts of meat. The hindquarters, exclusive of loin, contain about 23 percent of the meat of the entire animal. In cutting the carcass the loin and flanks are included with the hindquarters. In making out the score card for fat cattle the purpose has been to assign values to the various parts of the animal corresponding to the relative market values of the corresponding cuts and not to the corresponding relative weights. It is usually considered that the forequarters of the animal weigh about 52 percent and the hindquarters 48 percent.

### SCORE CARD FOR BREEDING CATTLE

A score card for judging breeding cattle needs to be slightly different from that for judging fat cattle and feeders. For a detailed study of the different parts, the fat-cattle score card may be used for breeding cattle, but it does not cover all the points which are desired in breeding beef cattle. For that reason the following score card is presented.

## Score card for breeding beef cattle

## Class -----

Scale of points	Standard	Student's score	Corrected score
1. Weight and size, according to age.....	10		
2. Form—deep, broad throughout, low-set, straight top and underline.....	25		
3. Constitution—good depth and width of chest.....	15		
4. Quality—smooth throughout; good handler as indicated by soft, loose, pliable skin covered with fine, mossy hair; bone, fine yet of sufficient substance and strength to carry the body.....	15		
5. Condition—carrying natural flesh enough to indicate vigor; free from patchiness.....	10		
6. Breed type and color—clean-cut head and neck with good form; color marking typical of breed.....	10		
7. Sex character—strong, masculine head and neck in bull; more refinement throughout cow than in bull.....	10		
8. Disposition—docile, with quiet temperament..... (Disqualifications eliminate the animal from the class.)	5		
	100		

## DISCUSSION OF SCORE CARD FOR BREEDING CATTLE

In the score card for judging breeding beef cattle there are enumerated those points which are most essential in an animal kept for reproduction. Included among these points are also those which are important from the commercial standpoint. The commercial idea must always be kept in mind, because the object of keeping the breeding cattle is to supply animals of the right kind for the butcher's block.

Under the points of the score card the weight and size according to age are important, because the greatest possible growth is desired in the shortest possible time. Quick growth usually indicates economical gains.

The form, or conformation, of breeding cattle is essentially the same as that of fat cattle. The body should be broad and deep throughout, with short, straight legs and a straight top and underline. The form of breeding cattle, unless in unusually fat condition, will be somewhat intermediate between that of feeders and fat cattle.

Quality is desired in beef animals kept for breeding purposes. The animals should have good handling qualities, as indicated by soft, pliable hide, covered with fine, silky hair. Fine bone is desirable, but it should be of sufficient size and quality to carry the body weight. Excessive bone is more desirable than too little.

The condition of breeding animals should be such that they have at least natural flesh enough to indicate vigor. The covering of flesh should be evenly distributed and be free from patchiness.

The type and form peculiar to each breed should be present to a marked degree.

The sex characters are also important. The bull should show masculinity, especially about the head, neck, and shoulders, while the cow should show more width and length in the pelvic region and more refinement than the bull.

The disposition or temperament is generally a minor point and is given a low score, but because of bad disposition many breeding animals are slaughtered long before their usefulness is over. A breed-

ing animal should have a docile disposition and a quiet temperament. A bad disposition, though not common in beef cattle, usually lessens the animal's ability to fatten.

### PROCEDURE IN JUDGING

In judging a class of cattle or inspecting a single individual, one should first make a general survey of the animals. From a short distance examine the general outline of each animal and note how closely it resembles the ideal beef animal. When first approaching the animal, note the front view and general features of the head and the width and depth of the chest. On moving toward the side, note the depth of the body and the lowness of the flank. The rear view will give the width of the back, spring of ribs, and thickness and development of the hindquarters, particularly the thighs and twist.

After the general survey of the animal, a close inspection of the various parts of the body should be made, beginning at the head. Examine the various parts of the head and proceed backward to the neck and shoulders. After the examination of these parts it is well to move a step or two away from the animal and compare the straightness of the top and underline, at the same time noting the depth of the chest and the constitution in general. Continuing the examination, proceed toward the loin and hips, feeling the hide and paying particular attention to the evenness and covering of flesh. In the examination of the hindquarters note the smoothness of the hips, levelness and width of the rump, and the depth and thickness of the thighs and twist. The quality and condition should be obtained from the inspection of the various parts during the examination.

In the case of beginners, judging work usually begins with the use of the score card, after having the various parts of the animal identified and the use of the score card explained. In using the score card one should make a complete examination of the individual before the various "cuts" are noted on the card. If this is done and the score of the various "cuts" put down on the card after the examination it will tend to cultivate confidence in one's memory and ability to remember the relative merits of the various parts. This is only for practice purposes; in close competitive judging contests further inspections should be allowed.

### COMPARATIVE JUDGING

The score card is primarily for the use of the beginner or amateur. It is to be used in learning the details of comparative judging which is used exclusively in placing the awards at beef-cattle shows. To become expert at comparative judging requires considerable practice. Patience and keen observation will aid in efficiency in selecting the best individuals and placing them in the order of excellence. Practice at first may be confined to selecting the best individual in a class of cattle of the same age and class. As more proficiency is obtained animals of different ages may be used, but the sexes should be kept separate. Except for practice purposes it is inadvisable to judge different breeds of breeding cattle in the same class, because it tends to result in prejudices and disagreements as to the merits and useful-

ness of the different breeds. In the judging of fat cattle, however, the breed standards have been replaced by the standard for fat cattle, thus putting all breeds under comparable conditions.

In comparative judging one must examine the various parts and make direct comparisons, keeping in mind the parts which are relatively the most important. For instance, it would be folly to place a fat animal having short, straight legs first if a second animal were only slightly poorer in that respect but much better in the region of the back or loin. The back or loin is a part having decidedly more value than the legs. The judge must constantly weigh the merits of the corresponding parts and summarize the total of the qualifications of each animal. He must keep a mental impression of the score card or similar scale of points and base his final decision upon his most careful judgment as to the relative merits of the animals for the purpose designated.

Beginners in comparative judging have a tendency to follow the score card in all its details. The score card is used for this specific purpose, but is intended mainly to familiarize the students with the detailed parts and to teach the relative importance of each. Its use is a step toward the more difficult task of comparative judging. In comparative judging one must take a broader view of the different parts than in score-card judging. The detailed parts of the head may be taken as a unit. The same is more or less true of the forequarters, the body, and the hindquarters. Only in a close competition does the judge need to compare the smallest details. Often in such contests the judge must make his final decision upon very slight differences in the quality or condition of the animals.

In judging breeding classes, such as "produce" of dam or "get" of sire, the judge is confronted with a very difficult task. It is very probable that many of the individuals have been up for competition and have been passed on before. If one judge has done all the judging and has kept in mind the animals which were placed at the top of the class on the individual basis, it may aid him materially in placing the group classes. It must be remembered that just because a group contains an animal placed first in the individual class is no indication that that group will be placed first. It often happens that the best individual may be in the group placed last. In classes composed of groups of animals the judge must compare each group as a whole and base his final conclusion upon a careful examination of the animals in each group. In these classes uniformity of breeding and trueness to breed type are especially important qualifications. The conformation, condition, and quality always command first consideration, but the others are of great importance in placing group classes of cattle.